

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0454

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PLOS, EWWT, SENV, TGEN, SN

SUBJ: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SHOWA MARU OIL SPILL

SUMMARY: EPA ENVIRONMENTALIST DR. HAROLD SNYDER CONCLUDED OBSERVATIONS WITH VISIT TO INDONESIAN WATERS OFF BATAM ISLAND JAN 30. ONLY SLIGHT AMOUNT OF OIL REMAINS IN AREA, AND LITTLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE NOTED. STUDY OF AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS, HOWEVER, SHOWS INEFFECTIVENESS OF CHEMICAL SPRAYING METHOD OF DISPERSING OIL. SNYDER DOES NOT FORESEE FURTHER EPA STUDY OF SPILL EFFECTS.

1. EPA OBSERVER DR. HAROLD SNYDER RETURNED TO SINGAPORE FROM JAKARTA ON JAN 29 IN ORDER MAKE BRIEF TRIP JAN 30 TO BATAM AND OFF-SHORE ISLANDS FOR PURPOSE OBSERVING POSSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE TO MARINE LIFE AND SHORELINE. ALTHOUGH GOI MIN OF COMMUNICATIONS

HAD PLANNED ORGANIZE TRIP FROM JAKARTA IT WAS EVIDENTLY EASIER TO PROVIDE PERTAMINA HELICOPTER SERVICE FROM SINGAPORE. INDONESIAN ENVIRONMENTALIST DR. KARDONO, WHO SURVEYED OIL SPILL DAMAGE PREVIOUSLY JAN 10-13, AND INDONESIAN EMBASSY SINGAPORE DCM ASWISMARMO ACCOMPANIED DR. SNYDER ON 6-HOUR VISIT TO BATAM JAN 30.

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2. SNYDER REPORTS RESULTS OF OBSERVATIONS OF INDONESIAN WATERS

OFF BATAM AND SMALLER ISLANDS TO NORTHWEST SOMEWHAT INCONCLUSIVE. HIGH TIDES THROUGHOUT VISIT HAMPERED VISUAL DETECTION OF OIL ON SHORELINE, MANGROVE ROOTS, AND ROCK OUTCROPPINGS, WHICH COULD HAVE PROVIDED CLEAR STATUS OF OIL SPILL EFFECTS. SOME OIL SMELL DETECTED IN OFFSHORE AREAS, BUT SNYDER RATHER PUZZLED THAT WHAT LITTLE OIL ACTUALLY OBSERVED EXTREMELY TARRY IN SUBSTANCE. THIS WOULD INDICATE OIL MIGHT NOT BE FROM SHOWA MARU SPILL BUT PROBABLY UNREFINED OIL FROM PERTAMINA RIGS IN AREA. LOCAL FISHERMEN ENCOUNTERED BY THE PARTY COMPLAINED OF WATER CONDITIONS AND POOR FISHING SINCE SLICK INVADDED THEIR WATERS 2 WEEKS AGO. ACCORDING TO VILLAGERS ON PULAU KASU, FISH CATCH FROM OFFSHORE TIDAL TRAPS IS DOWN FROM PREVIOUS AVERAGE OF 6 KILOS PER TRAP PER DAY TO APPROXIMATELY ONE KILO. SNYDER NOTES THAT VILLAGERS TALKING ABOUT ONE PARTICULAR BREED OF FISH, KNOWN LOCALLY AS "DEBANM" OR RABBIT FISH, THAT SCHOOLS IN THESE WATERS THIS TIME OF YEAR. NO SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF DEAD FISH OBSERVED, SO OIL APPARENTLY ONLY CAUSED FISH TO MOVE TEMPORARILY TO ANOTHER AS YET UNDETECTED AREA.

3. ALTHOUGH ONLY TRACES OF OIL SLICK OBSERVED IN BATAM AREA ON JAN 30, SNYDER REPORTS THAT AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY GOI DAILY SINCE THE SKOWA MARU ACCIDENT REVEAL THAT ONE CONTINUOUS MASS OF OIL SLICK EXISTED UP TO FEW DAYS AGO. THE SLICK EXTENDED FROM POINT DUEN, ORLA OF BATAM ISLAND, IN INDONESIAN WATERS, WEST TO SHORES OF GREAT KARIMUN ISLAND AT LEAST 20 KILOMETERS AWAY, ALSO IN INDONESIAN WATERS. A NARROW MASS OF THE SLICK EXTENDED NORTH OF GREAT KARIMUN TO THE WEST MALAYSIA SHORE NEAR KUKUP ISLAND. ACCORDING TO PHOTOGRAPHS, SLICK MOVED INTO SINGAPORE WATERS ONLY THE 4TH AND 5TH DAY AFTER THE INITIAL SPILL, AND BY THE 6TH DAY WINDS AND CURRENTS DROVE IT BACK TO INDONESIAN WATERS. SNYDER IS EMPHATIC IN BELIEF THAT CHEMICAL DISPERSANTS USED BY GOS DID LITTLE OR NOTHING TO DISPERSE OR MOVE SLICK. HE SAYS PHOTOS SHOW SLICK REMAINED RELATIVELY INTACT AND STATIC THROUGHOUT ENTIRE PERIOD GOS ENGAGED IN SPRAYING OPERATIONS. SNYDER HAS CONVEYED TO GOS THE EPA VIEW OF INEFFECTIVENESS AND POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS OF CHEMICAL DISPERSANTS AND INTENDS FOLLOW UP WITH ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL DATA.

4. BASED ON LIMITED FINDINGS BATAM VISIT AS WELL AS MEETINGS WITH GOI OFFICIALS IN JAKARTA, SNYDER WILL PROBABLY NOT RECOMMEND FURTHER EPA DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN STUDYING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF OIL
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SPILL. SNYDER INTENDS PROVIDE GOI SOME TECHNICAL GUIDANCE AS REQUESTED ON METHODOLOGY FOR PROPOSED GOI BIOLOGICAL "FATE AND EFFECTS" STUDY. SNYDER ALSO INTENDS AS NOTED ABOVE TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH PORT OF SINGAPORE AUTHORITY (PSA) TO PASS TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON SPILL CLEANUP METHODS. ALL THREE COASTAL STATES WILL BE INVITED BY EPA TO ATTEND CONFERENCE ON OIL POLLUTION PREVENTION WHICH EPA IS CO-SPONSORING WITH AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE MARCH 25-27 IN SAN FRANCISCO. BOTH GOI MINISTERS FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND RESEARCH

AND GOS PSA OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED THEIR INTEREST TO SNYDER IN
SENDING REPRESENTATIVES TO THIS CONFERENCE. CRONK

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